

CANFIELD ESCAPES

Excerpted from *Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and the Opening of Old Oregon* by Clifford M. Drury.

Among those who were wounded and who succeeded in finding temporary refuge in one of the mission buildings at the time the attack began, was W. D. Canfield. He and his family, being late comers to Waiilatpu, had to be content with some makeshift accommodations in the blacksmith shop. When the attack began, Canfield was butchering a beef with Hoffman and Kimball. Catherine tells us what happened: "He [i.e., Canfield] saw his family standing in the yard and ran over toward them. As he did so, he was wounded in the side [by a rifle bullet]. Snatching up his youngest child, and calling his family to follow him, he rushed into the house [possibly, the blacksmith shop]. Going upstairs, he concealed himself under some old lumber and rubbish where he lay until night." (87) The Indians did not pursue him into the building. Sometime during the early part of Monday night, Joe Stanfield came and showed him the trail that led to Lapwai. Evidently by this time, Canfield was convinced that the Indians did not intend to kill the women and children; that his life would be in grave danger should he remain on the premises; and that Mrs. Spalding and her family should be warned of their danger. He therefore started out on the 120-mile journey to Lapwai on foot even though he carried a rifle ball under the skin on one side of his body.

Canfield had never been over the trail before, but after being directed to the trail, he followed the well-beaten road which led in a northeasterly direction. Catherine wrote: "After traveling for a day or two, he fell in with an Indian and his boy driving cattle." Evidently they were friendly Nez Perces who had no objection to having a white man accompanying them. Canfield arrived at Lapwai on Saturday, December 4, having taken about four and a half days to make the journey. Mrs. Spalding, Mary Johnson (who had previously worked for Mrs. Whitman) and the three younger Spalding children were in the Spalding home. Horace Hart and Mr. Jackson were temporarily absent. Spalding tells of Canfield's sudden appearance. After being received into the home, he asked: "Has Mr. Spalding yet come?" Mrs. Spalding replied: "No, but we expect him every day." "The stranger replied: 'I have heavy tidings, they are all murdered at the Doct's.' All

were silent for a minute. My dear wife simply rose to her feet & with an unfaltering voice said, 'I was not prepared for this, but go on, Sir, let me hear the worst.' 'Mrs. Whitman is murdered & your husband without doubt shared the fate of all the women & children who I expect are butchered.'" (88)

Mrs. Spalding then said that she would inform the Indians at Lapwai as to what had happened. Canfield remonstrated as he feared that they might do what the Cayuses had done, but Mrs. Spalding knew the character of the Nez Perces. She called for Timothy and Eagle and sent a messenger to Craig's home located about eight miles up the valley from Lapwai. Craig, who had a Nez Perce wife, was the only white man who had settled in the vicinity of the Spalding mission. Although at times Craig had given Spalding much trouble, now he willingly offered shelter to Mrs. Spalding and her family. The next day, Sunday, an Indian arrived from Waiilatpu with the report that Spalding had fled on a horse, possibly headed for the Willamette Valley. Although Eliza was relieved to hear that her husband was alive, she remained concerned not only about his safety but also of her daughter who was among the captives being held at Waiilatpu.

When Canfield, Jackson, and Craig urged Mrs. Spalding to move on Sunday to the Craig home, she refused to do so. So strongly did she cling to the Puritan conception of strict Sunday observance that she would not travel eight miles even when grave danger threatened. "We will rest on the Sabbath," she said and then, paraphrasing a Biblical promise, added: "for he that obeyeth the commandment shall be rewarded." The example that Mrs. Spalding set that day in refusing to travel on Sunday was long remembered by the Christian Nez Perces.

On Monday morning, December 6, when Mrs. Spalding and her household were about to leave for the Craig home, a party of dissident Nez Perces from Chief Joseph's band suddenly appeared at Lapwai with evident hostile intentions. As with the Cayuses, these Nez Perces constituted only a small minority of the Nez Perce tribe and, since they lived near the Cayuses, had been adversely influenced by what had taken place at Waiilatpu. They arrived at Lapwai just as Craig and a party of friendly Nez Perces were about

ready to escort Mrs. Spalding up the valley. The hostile band, seeing that they were outnumbered, refrained from acts of violence for the time being, but as soon as the Craig party left, they looted the Spalding home. Mrs. Spalding, eager to learn what had happened to her daughter at Waiilatpu, sent two of the most trusted Nez Percés, Timothy and Eagle, to make inquiry.

Footnotes:

87. Pringle ms., p. 54. Catherine states that Canfield rushed his family into the emigrant house. In the author's copy of her manuscript, she intimates that he fled to the blacksmith shop and then hid in the lumber stored over the rafters. This latter seems to be the more reasonable of the two accounts.
88. Drury, *Spalding*, pp. 341-2, quoting from Spalding ms., Coll. W., dated Jan. 14, (1851?).